

# Taming the Shrew? Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics

Michaele L. Ferguson  
University of Colorado at Boulder  
*michaele.ferguson@colorado.edu*

Prepared for the Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop  
at the University of Chicago, May 3, 2011

## Abstract

Choice feminism is motivated by a fear of politics. It arises in response to three common criticisms of feminism: that feminism is too radical, too exclusionary, and too judgmental. In response, choice feminism offers a worldview that does not challenge the status quo, that promises to include all women regardless of their choices, and that abstains from judgment altogether. Moreover, it enables feminists to sidestep the difficulties of making the personal political: making judgments and demanding change of friends, family, and lovers. Yet judgment, exclusion, and calls for change are unavoidable parts of politics. If feminists are not to withdraw from political life altogether, we have to acknowledge the difficulty of engaging in politics. Political claims are partial; we will inevitably exclude, offend, or alienate some of those whom we should wish to have as allies. The political concerns and dilemmas to which choice feminism responds are very real. However, we can take seriously the political motivations behind choice feminism without withdrawing from politics. Instead, we need to complement an acknowledgment of the political dilemmas facing feminists with a celebration of the pleasures of engaging in politics with those who differ from and disagree with us.

*If you write about sexual politics you're going to piss people off.*

-Ariel Levy<sup>1</sup>

*A woman can and must judge other women. A woman can and must face the judgment of other women. ... A woman's judgment on her fellow woman always impresses her and can have an enormous importance for better or for worse, whether it is acknowledged or not. We do not propose to submit to it but, on the contrary, to acknowledge its weight, and therefore to think through and actualize a regime of social relations where female freedom is guaranteed by women themselves.*

-The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, Linda Hirshman coined the phrase “choice feminism” to name the widespread belief in the U.S. that the women's movement has liberated women to make whatever choices they want. As she describes this view, “A woman could work, stay home, have 10 children or one, marry or stay single. It all counted as ‘feminist’ as long as she *chose* it.”<sup>3</sup> For Hirshman, this insipid celebration of any and all choices a woman might make undermines feminists' capacity to engage in political critique. And it underlies what she claims is a recent trend for middle and upper-middle class women in the U.S. to be “homeward bound” – leaving promising careers to become stay-at-home moms (SAHMs), or to languish on the Mommy Track. Hirshman laments how this trend is producing a single-sex brain drain from the nation's law firms and boardrooms.<sup>4</sup>

While Hirshman focuses on choices women make about wage work and unpaid labor in the home, choice feminism is a much broader phenomenon. The view that today all choices are feminist can be invoked to support decisions to wear lipstick and high heels, to participate in *Girls Gone Wild!*, to sleep with men, to enjoy pornography, to not have children, to hire a maid, or to adopt a gendered division of labor. It's the creed of Third Wave feminists like Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, whose capacious understanding of feminism includes every

life choice, so long as it is accompanied by “a political consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> It is the implicit feminism of the George W. Bush Presidency,<sup>6</sup> whose foreign policy emphasized giving women abroad “access to more opportunities.”<sup>7</sup> It is echoed as well in Hillary Clinton’s State Department, whose rhetoric calls for the economic and political “empowerment” of individual women.<sup>8</sup> As my colleagues confirm, it is in our classrooms, where students profess strong views on controversial feminist issues, yet refuse to apply them to others, saying, “but that’s just my personal opinion.”

What unites those I will call “choice feminists” on the left and the right, in the academy, the workplace, and the home, is not so much an ideology or a specific political platform.<sup>9</sup> After all, one could be a choice feminist who endorses women’s varied choices about working and mothering, and yet insist that certain sexual choices are demeaning to all women (e.g., engaging in submission, stripping, enjoying pornography, dressing in a ‘slutty’ way). Or one could be quite the opposite: endorsing sexual freedoms of all kinds, while insisting that women should occupy particular kinds of roles outside of the bedroom. Hirshman addresses only one variant of choice feminism. What I mean to analyze in this paper is the *way of thinking* about feminist politics that underlies all of these different variants. We might call it an *orientation* to feminist politics.

Understood as an orientation, choice feminism has three important features. First, it understands freedom as the capacity to make individual choices, and oppression as the inability to choose. Consequently, as long as a woman can say that she has chosen to do something, it is considered by choice feminists to be an expression of her liberation. Second, since the only criterion for evaluating women’s freedom is individual choice, we should abstain from judging the content of the choices women make. It is definitionally impossible for a woman to choose

her own oppression; all choices she makes are equally expressions of her freedom, and therefore equally to be supported. Finally, this view of freedom is undergirded by a particular historical narrative: it is the women's movement in the past that has made it possible for women to make free choices in the present. In some cases, this is a way of celebrating the successes of the women's movement. In other cases, however, this narrative supports the view that we are now post-feminist, the women's movement achieved all that was necessary some time ago, and women today are fully liberated.<sup>10</sup>

In this essay, I critically examine choice feminism, understood as a particular orientation to politics. In the following section, I argue that it arises as a response to the structure of feminist politics. In particular, I suggest that as a response to criticisms that feminism is too radical, exclusionary, and judgmental, choice feminism evinces a fear of politics. It aims to avoid having to make judgments, to avoid taking controversial stands that might offend and exclude, and to de-radicalize feminist claims. The political concerns and dilemmas to which choice feminism responds are very real. Consequently, I conclude by suggesting that we take seriously the political motivations behind choice feminism without withdrawing from politics. Instead, I argue that as feminists we need to complement an acknowledgment of the political dilemmas facing feminists with a celebration of the pleasures of engaging in politics with those who differ from and disagree with us.

## **The Allure of Choice Feminism**

The literature about choice feminism tends to follow a generational logic: an older generation of feminists fought for women's liberation; a newer generation takes this liberation for granted and uncritically celebrates all women's choices.<sup>11</sup> An older generation of women wanted to

pursue careers; a newer generation wants to choose stay-at-home motherhood. Choice feminism, therefore, is always represented as a comparatively new position in contrast with an older position, usually figured as more true to feminism. Interestingly, though, there is no agreement in this literature about which is the new generation of women responsible for its emergence. Hirshman marks the historical turning point all the way back in 1972, with the ascendance of “the confrontation-averse Gloria Steinem.”<sup>12</sup> For bell hooks, the downturn took place in the early 80s with the rise of “a lifestyle-based feminism which suggested any woman could be a feminist no matter what her political beliefs.”<sup>13</sup> Judith Warner locates the shift with “the first post-baby boom generation, girls of the 1960s and 1970s who came of age politically in the Carter, Reagan, and Bush I years”;<sup>14</sup> this is the same generation that Lisa Belkin famously identified in *The New York Times* as the vanguard of the ‘opt-out revolution.’<sup>15</sup> Other recent articles in the *Times* reveal that the logic of choice feminism is prevalent among undergraduates currently attending elite colleges.<sup>16</sup> And Claire Snyder identifies choice feminism with Third Wave feminists writing in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>17</sup>

This generational logic, whether the authors intend it or not, risks reinforcing a false generational divide within feminism. It encourages those of us who are critical of choice feminism to see other, younger women as the problem: they take feminism for granted, and they lack the courage to pursue careers, reject traditional marriage, or otherwise fail to live up to our conceptions of what feminists should be and do. It encourages those of us who are sympathetic to choice feminism to see older feminists as the problem: they are closed-minded and judgmental, they try to tell us how we should live our lives according to an outdated and narrow understanding of feminism, and they do not accept that we might have good reasons for making

different choices than they have made. In either case, this generational way of understanding focuses our attention on conflict with one another: on other women and other feminists.

Moreover, since this logic focuses our attention on pointing fingers at each other, it keeps us from seeing current articulations of choice feminism as only the most recent manifestation of a recurrent position in the feminist political imaginary. What if we take seriously Hirshman's observation that choice feminism, in some form, has been present in American feminist politics since at least 1972? That suggests that choice feminism is not the rebellion of a particular generation of younger women against a particular set of feminist foremothers. Instead, it appears to be a recurrent political position that finds its adherents again and again: from 1972, to the early 80s, to Third Wave feminists writing in the 90s, to the current crop of undergraduates in 2011.

Indeed, I contend that choice feminism echoes back through the history of Western feminism at least to John Stuart Mill.<sup>18</sup> He tempered the radicalism of his policy recommendations (granting women more rights within marriage, and access to higher education and the professions) with the moderating reassurance that, given the opportunity to pursue careers, most women likely would not choose that path. Instead, he assuages his readers' concerns that his proposals might undermine the institutions of marriage and family when he suggests that most women would choose to continue in traditional roles as wives and mothers rather than compete with men for wage-earning jobs.<sup>19</sup> His aim, therefore, is only to provide women with more choices; it is oppressive, unjust, and bad for society to prevent talented women from becoming educated and pursuing careers in which they may benefit the public. Yet his goal is simply to make more choices available to women, not to ensure that they will, in fact, choose to exercise their new options. This is choice feminism in another form: as long as we can say that women

have the choice to pursue careers, they are liberated; we cannot call them oppressed if they subsequently decide to devote their lives to only being wives and mothers.

When we situate contemporary feminist concerns about choice feminism in a broader historical tradition, this shifts the questions we should ask. Rather than asking what's wrong with a particular generation, we should be asking: what could explain the persistent appeal of choice feminism, such that it appears again and again in the feminist political imaginary? Is there something about feminist politics, or about Western or Anglo-American feminism in particular, that produces and reproduces the allure of choice feminism? How does our understanding of contemporary feminism shift if we start with the assumption that choice feminism arises from and continues to be sustained by feminist politics itself?

I propose that we think of choice feminism as a way of responding to three interrelated and common criticisms of feminism that disaffect potential allies. Choice feminism hopes to defuse these criticisms by representing feminism as a nonthreatening, capacious movement that welcomes all supporters – however discordant their views –, while demanding only the thinnest of political commitments. In other words, choice feminism's political function is to try to make feminism seem appealing to the broadest constituency possible.

### **Criticism #1: Feminism is too radical.**

Feminists are frequently charged with demanding political and personal changes that go too far - that undermine institutions like marriage and the family, or restrict individual freedoms to dress, love, and have sex as we please. This is the kind of criticism that Mill anticipated in *The Subjection of Women*: that extending political and economic rights to women would undermine marriage and the family. If we let mothers work, who will take care of children? Mill reassures his readers that we are not necessarily in for dramatic social changes if we were to extend equal

rights to women: his feminism does not require that women all become educated and pursue careers; it only requires that they have the *opportunity* to do so.

The twenty-first century equivalent of Mill's move is to reassure us that feminism's demands are minimal. As Baumgardner and Richards put it: "You're sexy, a wallflower, you shop at Calvin Klein, you are a stay-at-home mom, a big Hollywood producer, a beautiful bride all in white, an ex-wife raising three kids, or you shave, pluck, and wax. In reality, feminism wants you to be whoever you are—but with a political consciousness."<sup>20</sup> Being a feminist does not mean that you have to have a job, that you have to give up shaving and wearing a bra, that you have to be anti-sex, that you have to be critical of the fashion industry. In fact, you can keep doing whatever you have been doing – all that Baumgardner and Richards ask is that you do these things 'with a political consciousness' (whatever that is).<sup>21</sup> Consequently, choice feminists can market feminism to a broad audience as compatible with virtually any life choices, and seemingly at odds with none.

### **Criticism #2: Feminists are exclusionary.**

The classic (and often well-placed) form of this criticism is that American feminists are only concerned about the rights and needs of white, middle-class, Western, straight women. American feminism since the 70s has come under repeated attack for excluding or disparaging the needs and viewpoints of women of color, lesbians, working-class women, non-Western women, and intersexed persons. For many feminists, faced with a long history of scathing criticism, it sometimes seems that the worst sin a feminist could commit would be to exclude others.

Choice feminism is a reaction to this fear of excluding some of those whom we would wish to have as political allies and fellow-travelers. Hirshman describes Steinem as particularly



concerned to include as many as possible: “Under her uncritically accepting eye, feminism expanded to embrace every oppressed group.”<sup>22</sup> This concern to avoid exclusion is also dominant in contemporary Third Wave feminism, as Leslie Heywood argues: “for the third wave, feminism is a form of inclusiveness; a feminism that allows for identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism. For example, one can be a devout Christian or a Muslim and also be feminist, one can identify with ‘male’ cultures like sport and also be feminist, or one can participate in as well as critique beauty culture and also be feminist.”<sup>23</sup> The logic of choice feminism is one that aims to be as inclusive as possible. Baumgardner and Richards accomplish this by stepping back from the notion that feminists are united by a common identity or a political platform: for them, feminists are merely “a loose collection of individuals.”<sup>24</sup> If feminists only loosely form a collectivity, then we can more readily comprehend diverse identities and perspectives, and avoid the problems of essentialism and exclusion that plagued the Second Wave.

### **Criticism #3: Feminists are judgmental.**

Feminists have often been criticized for being judgmental – that is, for making moralizing judgments where such judgment is inappropriate and therefore unwelcome.<sup>25</sup> These criticisms have come from the right – for example, the criticisms that feminism is anti-homemaker, anti-men, anti-heterosexual, and anti-family. They have also come from the left, from those concerned that feminists are critical of women who choose motherhood – especially SAHMs—, whose family lives follow a gendered division of labor, who have and enjoy heterosexual sex (or any sex), who choose to be married, and who wear makeup and enjoy femininity. Judgmental feminists, according to these critics, think they have the right to tell the rest of us what to do and how to live our lives, to tell us who counts as a feminist, and who has betrayed feminism by

failing to live up to their standards. Such feminists unnecessarily intrude into personal matters, when they should be more tolerant and open-minded. They denigrate and devalue other people's personal choices, which has the negative political consequence of turning many people off of feminism who should be drawn towards it.

In response to these concerns, choice feminists try to avoid making judgments about other people's personal lives. Naomi Wolf, for example, castigates what she calls "victim feminism" for being "judgmental of other women's sexuality and appearance."<sup>26</sup> In its place, she advocates "power feminism," which is pro-sex, pro-money, and whose core tenets include that "women have the right to determine their lives."<sup>27</sup> Another Third Wave feminist, Rebecca Walker, urges feminists to "Avoid making judgments about people based on generalizations and stereotypes. While you're at it, avoid making judgments about people at all. Make up your mind about people based on your actual experiences."<sup>28</sup> Even a critic of choice feminism like Warner nonetheless tries to avoid coming across as judgmental herself when she writes, "I do not think that women *should* do anything---other than remain true to themselves so that they can be happy."<sup>29</sup> After offering a devastating critique of the current American cult of motherhood, she nonetheless declines to judge the women who indulge in and perpetuate it. Anxious to avoid appearing judgmental, we accept all choices as valid and sidestep the difficulty of judging between them.<sup>30</sup>

Feminism will continue to provoke these three criticisms so long as it is deeply critical of existing institutions, it aims in any way to speak for or about a collectivity (such as women), and it claims that the personal is political. As long as feminism provokes these criticisms, some feminists will be tempted to adopt a choice feminist orientation in response. Nonetheless, while

I am suggesting that choice feminism is a response produced by the structure of certain kinds of feminist politics that can be found at least 150 years back, this does not mean that it always and everywhere will manifest in the same ways. Choice feminism in the U.S. today is a position adopted not only by self-proclaimed feminist activists, but also (and perhaps more significantly) by people who do not even think of themselves as feminist. It is found in popular television shows *Sex and the City* and *30 Rock*, and it is expressed by conservative political figures like Laura Bush and Condi Rice.<sup>31</sup> Choice feminism today is not simply a position taken by advocates of feminism; it is a commonplace in U.S. culture and politics.

In order to explain the widespread appeal of choice feminism to non-feminists in the contemporary U.S., then, we have to make recourse to additional factors. The emphasis on women's liberation as liberation to make individual choices has purchase in contemporary America because it resonates with other political ideas already widespread. Many commentators have noted that the women's movement in post-*Roe* reproductive politics made the language of choice synonymous with women's liberation.<sup>32</sup> As Summer Wood puts it, "The word's primacy in the arena of reproductive rights has slowly caused the phrase 'It's my choice' to become synonymous with 'It's a feminist thing to do'—or, perhaps more precisely, 'It is anti-feminist to criticize my decision.'"<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the language of choice resonates with the liberal individualist political philosophy that is widespread in American political culture, grounded in the Millian position that individual freedom is to be tolerated so long as it does not bring harm to others. Warner suggests this connection when, attacking choice feminism as it is manifest in the Mommy Wars, she characterizes it as "a perverse form of individualism,"<sup>34</sup> which by individualizing choices and problems, privatizes them.<sup>35</sup> This broader resonance, Rickie Salinger notes, helps the language

of choice seem nonthreatening and conventional, and appeal to a wide audience: “‘choice’ could be perceived as an essentially conservative claim of personal freedom from state intervention.”<sup>36</sup> Feminism, understood as empowering women to make individual choices, is thus compatible with both liberal and conservative worldviews.

Finally, and perhaps most problematically, the language of choice is compatible with and complicit in neoliberal consumerism. Ariel Levy notes this connection to neoliberalism when she argues that raunch culture is a narrow form of sexuality that is being marketed to women and girls as sexual freedom.<sup>37</sup> Wood summarizes the consumerist logic of choice feminism thus: “The cult of choice consumerism wills us to believe that women can get everything we want out of life, as long as we make the right choices along the way—from the cereal we eat in the morning to the moisturizer we use at night, and the universe of daily decisions, mundane and profound, that confront us in between.”<sup>38</sup>

Yet choice feminism is not just being marketed to women and girls by corporate interests; feminism itself is becoming neoliberalized. As Wendy Brown describes it, “neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life.”<sup>39</sup> Choice feminism embraces the liberated woman as liberated, neoliberal consumer/entrepreneur. This feminist consumerism was expressed poignantly in a *Sex and the City* episode fittingly titled “A Woman’s Right to Shoes,” in which Carrie Bradshaw celebrates her choice to be single and childless by proclaiming the legitimacy of her desire to acquire a large stash of expensive, designer shoes.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, choice feminists like Jessica Valenti see feminism itself as a kind of commodity to be marketized.<sup>41</sup> As Nina Power puts it, choice feminism “believes it has to compliment capitalism in order to effectively sell its product.”<sup>42</sup>

Given the broad cultural resonances of the language of choice and its marketability, we should not be surprised to find that today's choice feminism has widespread appeal in American culture.

## **The Politics of the Personal**

So far, I have argued that choice feminism is a reaction produced by the structure of feminist politics, and that its spread in contemporary America is facilitated by its resonance with pro-choice rhetoric, liberal individualism, and neoliberal consumerism. While these are all important to explaining the allure of choice feminism in contemporary America, in this section I contend that perhaps the most intractable source of its appeal lies in the personal dilemmas faced by those of us who would be feminists.

Feminists live in relationship with people who (whether consciously or unconsciously) are sexist and anti-feminist. We live with people whose lives have gone seemingly untouched by the women's movement, or who lack an awareness of the political character of their personal decisions. Our world is one that has only been partially and imperfectly transformed by feminism; all of us who would be feminists live at odds with the world around us.

The disjuncture between our political principles and our personal lives produces dilemmas for feminists. Consider that many of us have mothers, sisters, friends, and colleagues who have – whether by choice or not – been homemakers and SAHMs. Adopting a political position like Hirshman's – that homemaking and childrearing do not make full use of women's capacities – places feminists in an impossible bind: they have to disrupt and potentially undermine relationships with people whose choices they condemn, or they have to bite their tongues and support the problematic choices of those they love. From this dilemma, a choice feminist position is born and sustained. To do anything less than to celebrate all women's choices equally

is to ask of us that we judge those who are closest to us and risk severing or damaging our relationships with them. As some students of mine have put it, to condemn homemaking as a valid choice for women is to condemn their own mothers – which they cannot do. And so they refuse to make judgments and instead adopt a choice feminist position.

This dilemma – that feminist political consciousness requires of us that we understand those we love and care about as having made nonfeminist or even anti-feminist choices, which understanding puts in jeopardy those same relationships – is pervasive for feminists living in a world only partially transformed by feminism. Our political views and consciousness necessitate judgments about those we love: about the gendered division of labor within a friend's marriage, about the choice a sister makes to leave the workforce to stay at home with her children, about the way a teenage daughter wants to dress and act, about the sexist and homophobic jokes a friend likes to tell, about how one's partner places his career goals above one's own, about a colleague's desire to have another child before tenure when her case is already shaky. Yet, if we articulate these judgments, or allow them to affect our relationships, we risk triggering passionate conflict – which makes relationship unpleasant if not impossible. However, if we suspend judgment in the context of our personal relationships, we seem to be failing in courage as feminists – for feminism is precisely about reworking and revisioning the personal.

Our political views also exact a demanding standard for ourselves: we, too, must strive for an egalitarian distribution of labor in the home, for nonsexist relations with others, to not fall back into traditionalist gender roles. If I do the dishes tonight, have I given in? If I wear lipstick and show some cleavage, am I selling out the women's movement? How much time should a feminist take off from her career to spend with a newborn? It can be exhausting to subject our every thought, our every decision to feminist analysis. And if our most personal relationships

are with people who are not equally committed to feminism, we may find ourselves unsupported in making changes in our personal lives.

It is possible to imagine living as a feminist with this dilemma: accepting that being a feminist means loving nonfeminists, and accepting one's own inability to fully embody one's own feminist principles. This is the kind of feminism that Lori Marso urges us towards: a feminism involving humility and self-forgiveness, an awareness that we are all constrained by the demands of femininity.<sup>43</sup> Yet this is a position that is difficult to occupy, and perhaps even more difficult to sustain.

By comparison, choice feminism offers us an easy way to opt out of the dilemma altogether. It releases us from the burden of judging those close to us: our older friends and relatives can be excused because they did not have the choices available to us now; our peers can be excused from judgment because in making choices, they cannot be sexist or regressive – they are just making free choices in a world in which we all have options. Choice feminism also relieves us of the burden of being consistently feminist ourselves: we do not have to struggle to bring our own personal lives into line with a demanding set of principles, because the only relevant principle is that our personal arrangements be freely chosen – and it is dangerously easy to convince ourselves that what we do is a simple matter of free choice.

Choice feminism will continue to have broad appeal to feminists because it gives us an easy way out of the dilemmas of politicizing the personal. If we wish to counteract the influence of choice feminism, then we need to do a better job as feminists of acknowledging the difficulty of living a feminist life. We need to give voice to these dilemmas, and we need to provide guidance to one another on how to live *with* them.

## **The Fear of Political Freedom**

Most criticisms that have so far been levied at choice feminism attack its focus on individual choice. This focus divorces choice from the broader institutional, political, historical, and social contexts in which choices take place. This means that choice feminism obscures how our choices are shaped for us.<sup>44</sup> Hirshman argues that the “choice” for women to quit their jobs and become SAHMs is shaped by the current U.S. tax code that penalizes two career married couples;<sup>45</sup> Warner argues that the “choice” to become a super-mom is framed by a historically contingent cult of motherhood with roots in child psychology, an underfunded and underregulated child care industry, and a conservative backlash against feminism;<sup>46</sup> Levy argues that the “choices” to express one’s sexuality through public exhibition for men, to have cosmetic surgery to meet a porn star ideal of beauty, and to learn to striptease are produced by the commodification of a narrow range of sexuality sold to women as sexual liberation.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, choice feminism fails to differentiate between those who can choose and those who cannot; analysis of how class, race, sexuality, and power affect women’s choices is often missing.<sup>48</sup> Since it represents choices as a matter of individual responsibility alone, choice feminism can be deployed to punish women who have “made” the wrong choices.<sup>49</sup> It also misleadingly suggests that since choices are individual, they have no social consequences; women are therefore relieved of responsibility for considering the broader implications of their decisions.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, individual choices are figured as private matters of no one else’s concern.<sup>51</sup> This means that it is inappropriate to politicize women’s choices. Consequently, choice feminism is radically depoliticizing: it discourages us from forming judgments about the value of different choices, it discourages us from giving a public account for the choices we make, it shuts down critical discussion about which choices should be valued and which choices are mere



illusions,<sup>52</sup> it uncritically embraces consumerism,<sup>53</sup> and most problematically for the future of feminism, it deters women from being active in politics to improve childcare, public schools, and working conditions – all of which are deemed private matters.<sup>54</sup> As Hirshman depressingly puts it, “the invitation to leave one another alone is really an invitation to leave the current unjust arrangement in place.”<sup>55</sup>

Some choice feminists – following in the footsteps of Baumgardner and Richards – might respond to these criticisms by suggesting that we can avoid these problems of choice as long as we complement a celebration of the diversity of women’s choices with a political consciousness.<sup>56</sup> In other words, a modified choice feminism would not celebrate *all* women’s choices equally – but only those made by women who are conscious of the politics of their choices. For example, a woman might choose to end her career and stay at home to raise children; her choice would be feminist not as such, but only insofar as she “reflect[s] on her own desires and seriously consider[s] how her choices might play a role in propping up or calling into question the sex/gender system.”<sup>57</sup> This modification might go a long way towards satisfying some of choice feminism’s critics. However, it does not go far enough.

My concern is that this move does not address the political drives behind choice feminism: the drive to make feminism appeal to as many people as possible and the drive to escape the dilemmas of feminism in our personal lives. Ultimately, the problem with choice feminism is not that it celebrates women’s choices without having a political consciousness. The problem is that – even complemented by a political consciousness – the turn to choice feminism is motivated by a *fear of politics*. It aims to sidestep the need to make judgments, it aims to avoid making exclusions, and it aims to downplay the radicalism of feminism’s challenges to the status quo. Yet judgment, exclusion, and calls for change are unavoidable parts of politics. What is

ultimately being expressed in a choice feminist position is a fantasy of a world without politics: a world in which we are never called upon to defend our views to those who disagree, in which we never offend anyone because we tolerate everyone, and in which we do not attempt as a collectivity to bring about structural changes. This is a vision of a world in which we all get along not because we agree, but because we studiously avoid conflict. What good is a political consciousness if we are afraid to use it?

The conception of freedom at the heart of choice feminism is the classic freedom of modern liberalism: individual license to do as one pleases free from political interference. However, there is a countervailing tradition of feminist political thought that expresses a very different understanding of freedom - one which is inseparable from political engagement.<sup>58</sup> On this account, women have been oppressed not so much because they have been denied the freedom to choose their own individual paths,<sup>59</sup> as because they have been denied participation in public life. Feminists in this tradition have decried the historical absence of women in positions of power not as the symptom of a lack of choices, but as the systematic exclusion of women from involvement in shaping the world in which they live. The remedy for this form of oppression is not mere opportunity to get involved, but the active exercise of *political freedom* – what Linda Zerilli describes as “the capacity to found new forms of political association.”<sup>60</sup> Women are free only to the extent that they are engaged in the political practice of creating, reimagining, and transforming the shared world in which they live.

The exercise of political freedom is difficult and demanding because it requires that we make judgments - hard, messy judgments. Claims about the relative value of different choices, claims about the justice or injustice of particular courses of action, are exercises in judgment. Without making judgments, politics becomes vacuous relativism: we have no reason to prefer one course

of action over another. Yet making judgments is always potentially terrifying and demands a certain amount of courage because, when it comes to political matters, we have no objective set of standards for judging that could serve as a set of guidelines for us to follow. Political freedom requires that we make the best judgments that we can, without knowing for certain that the judgments we make are correct.

Moreover, politics involves making our uncertain judgments public, submitting them to the scrutiny of others, and trying to persuade these others to share our views. However, there is no guarantee that when we share our judgments, other people will agree with them. Simply because I believe my judgment is the best does not mean that others will, too. As Zerilli argues, “political claims have a fundamentally *anticipatory* structure.”<sup>61</sup> That is, when we express judgments and claim them as valid for others, we anticipate, we hope that others will agree with us; but we cannot know in advance whether they will. Making judgments therefore always involves taking risks: a risk that my justifications will not be persuasive to others, and a risk that after subjecting my views to public scrutiny, I may find that my judgments are no longer persuasive to me. Most importantly for our discussion, Zerilli notes that political judgment always risks exclusion: I may claim to speak for a group (say ‘women’) and find in response that not all women agree with what I say, or agree that I have the authority to speak for them.<sup>62</sup> The choice feminist orientation misunderstands this disagreement and exclusion as evidence of the *failure* of politics; yet it is an expected part of the public exchange of uncertain judgments. When we make judgments, we take the risk that others will not agree with us, that we are going to offend some people we would like to persuade, and that we are going to turn off some people from feminism who we would prefer to have as allies. That’s politics.

Exercising judgment is not the same as being judgmental (although choice feminists often equate the two). Judging is coming to a decision where there is no objectively right or wrong choice to be made. Rather than inappropriately imposing personal standards on other people from without, the practice of judgment involves becoming aware that we make political claims within in a world of others who are differently situated and who need to be persuaded of the validity of our claims. Zerilli argues that political judgments require “learning to make claims that take others into account and to elicit criteria in an effort to persuade them of one’s own view.”<sup>63</sup> To say that feminists should make judgments is not to say that we will all from the start be capable of making *good* judgments – judgments that fully acknowledge others and are persuasive to them. Feminists who fail to make ‘claims that take others into account’ are not thereby being judgmental. Instead, they are *practicing* judgment – that is, judging without having become masters of judgment. Judging is a political skill we learn to do better by practicing it in the company of others.

The criticism that feminists are judgmental, therefore, may sometimes be a misplaced criticism. What is meant may be something like: your judgment is narrow-minded and does not take my perspective into account, and I think we can do better. The disagreement, in other words, may be a political one about *how* we should judge – rather than a disagreement about whether we should judge in the first place. For example, the charge that certain feminists are prudishly anti-sex need not be understood as a claim that these feminists are judgmental about other people’s sex lives. Instead, it can be understood as a political claim: that we feminists ought to endorse sexuality as an important expression of human flourishing, perhaps, rather than an irremediable site of the oppression of women. What pro-sex feminists are arguing against, then, is not judgmentalness, but a particular anti-sex judgment. Choice feminists disavow their

own position when they reject judgment as such; after all, they are passing judgment on their fellow feminists even as they claim to want to avoid judging!<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, some people do mean to suggest that feminists are judgmental, and not merely making poor judgments. In such cases, what is meant is that feminists are making judgments about personal matters that do not concern them. In other words, the charge of judgmentalness is grounded in a liberal worldview: it suggests that there is an appropriate sphere for the exercise of judgment beyond which judging others is unacceptable. We need to see this accusation for what it is - an attempt to reassert the boundary between public and private that many feminists have long contested. If we are to take seriously the premise that "the personal is political" - then we have to resist the notion that to critically analyze the politics of the personal is necessarily to be judgmental. Feminists need to publicly make judgments about personal matters – sex, career decisions, dress and makeup, power in intimate relationships – because reimagining our personal lives is an essential component of a feminist reimagining of the world we share.

Political freedom is very demanding: engaging in politics requires time, energy, commitment, courage, and a willingness to take risks. If we make a political claim that is worth making – one that is markedly different from the dominant views in our society, rather than a mere parroting of the status quo – chances are we are going to offend and alienate some people just by speaking out. Politics takes *courage* – the courage to be unpopular, to say what one thinks, to be criticized, to have to admit that one's judgment was poor and needs revising, to give a defense of one's positions to people who challenge us. It is understandable that choice feminists would be afraid of politics because of what it demands of us. But we should not run from a fight<sup>65</sup> simply because the fight is hard and its outcome is uncertain. What we need is to remind ourselves of

the pleasures of politics, the parts of political action that make being courageous in the face of risk enjoyable and worthwhile.

## **Towards Taking Feminist Pleasure in Politics**

When I suggest that feminists need to take pleasure in politics, I do not mean that political action is always and only pleasurable. On the contrary, I believe it is extremely important for us to acknowledge how very difficult and demanding it is to be a politically engaged feminist. This is especially so because of the dilemmas of making the personal political that I described above. Making judgments as a feminist means making judgments about myself, and making judgments about others - friends, lovers, parents, co-workers, and other feminists - that may have very painful consequences. We have to make difficult choices about which battles to fight – because surely it would exhaust any activist to pick a fight each time there is cause to do so. Consequently, we have to make compromises, and we often have to compromise ourselves and our principles in the process. We need a feminist account of politics, therefore, that helps us to make sense of the impossibility of being a feminist in an only partially transformed world.

Moreover, we need to acknowledge that engaging in politics – whether in the bedroom, the boardroom, or the Oval Office – is risky. It involves taking the risk of being rejected and ridiculed, offending others, losing a fight, and even undermining the very causes we would support. It is no wonder choice feminists fear politics. We need to acknowledge these fears as legitimate without allowing them to paralyze us.

Hirshman, worried that women are opting out of elite careers, calls on feminists to sing the pleasures of work.<sup>66</sup> In contemporary America, it has become unfashionable to proclaim that one finds work pleasurable, and politically incorrect to insist that women who opt out are thereby

missing out on some important element of human flourishing. Against these trends, she urges women to embrace “the love that dares not speak its name: love of work.”<sup>67</sup>

It is in this spirit that I call on feminists to resist the temptation to reject judgment and exclusion, and to instead remind ourselves of politics’ many pleasures. In particular, we need to celebrate the pleasures that arise from engaging in politics precisely with people who are different from and disagree with us – the ones who most threaten feminism with the criticisms that it is too radical, exclusionary, and judgmental. Encounters with our critics contain an important possibility of pleasure.

Here, I draw on Iris Young’s argument that the eroticism in the encounter with otherness that happens regularly in city life can serve as a model for thinking of a new ethos of democratic engagement with otherness. Just as in politics, the eroticism of the other in city life is both the source of pleasure and danger:

The erotic dimension of the city has always been an aspect of its fearfulness, for it holds out the possibility that one will lose one’s identity, will fall. But we also take pleasure in being open to and interested in people we experience as different. We spend a Sunday afternoon walking through Chinatown, or checking out this week’s eccentric players in the park. We look for restaurants, stores, and clubs with something new for us, a new ethnic food, a different atmosphere, a different crowd of people. We walk through sections of the city that we experience as having unique characters which are not ours, where people from diverse places mingle and then go home.<sup>68</sup>

This urban pleasure in difference – while it is not without its own risk of exoticizing otherness, or reducing it to a cuisine or lifestyle – serves as a model for reimagining the encounter with difference in democratic life as erotic. There is, for Young, a “pleasure in being drawn out of

oneself to understand that there are other meanings, practices, perspectives on the city, and that one could learn or experience something more and different by interacting with them.”<sup>69</sup>

This is the pleasure of exercising political freedom: in exchanging political judgments with others, I encounter new positions, new perspectives, that take me outside of myself.

Encountering and learning about others, trying to see the world from their perspective, is not only threatening insofar as it challenges my positions, but it can also be erotic, exciting, different, and new.

Of course, for feminists whose very survival is threatened,<sup>70</sup> the idea that they should see politics as pleasurable may seem condescending and naïve. It may be difficult – if not impossible – for women under such conditions to experience politics as pleasurable. Perhaps this pleasure in learning from others can be experienced only under certain basic conditions – such as a guarantee of physical security – or only by those with certain habits of listening and being open-minded. Nonetheless, even – and perhaps especially – in situations where we feel most threatened, we need to be able to find some pleasure in politics in order to sustain our engagement.

With this in mind, we as feminists need to cultivate an erotic orientation to politics, one that enables us to hear criticisms of feminism as pleasurable invitations to learn about how others see us, how they experience their lives, how we might make better political claims in the future – claims that would include not by blandly embracing any and all choices, but by taking more thoughtful stands and giving more careful justifications to others that, we can only hope, they will find alluring.



---

## Notes

An earlier and shorter version of this essay was published as a part of a symposium on Choice Feminism as Michaela Ferguson, "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010). I would like to thank the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder for generously funding the 2008 conference on Women's Choices and the Future of Feminism that supported the development of this symposium. My work in spring 2008 on this project was supported by a Faculty Fellowship at the Center for the Humanities and the Arts at the University of Colorado at Boulder. I am grateful to Lorraine Bayard de Volo, Nancy Hirschmann, Jennet Kirkpatrick, Jill Locke, Lori Marso, Celeste Montoya-Kirk, Laurie Naranch, Claire Snyder-Hall, Steve Vanderheiden, and Karen Zivi for the conversations that provoked me to write this essay and the critical feedback that made it better.

<sup>1</sup> Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 206.

<sup>2</sup> The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Linda R. Hirshman, "Homeward Bound," *The American Prospect*, November 22 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World* (New York, NY: Viking, 2006), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 56-57.

<sup>6</sup> Michaela Ferguson and Lori Marso, "Introduction: Feminism, Gender, and Security in the Bush Presidency," in *W Stands for Women: How the Bush Presidency Has Shaped a New Politics of Gender*, ed. Michaela Ferguson and Lori Marso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at the 'One Woman Initiative' Fund for Women's Empowerment," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/05/104629.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> The rhetoric of "women's empowerment" under the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama is likely a reflection of language used in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that came out of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

"Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,"

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html>. The third Millennium Development Goal adopted by the UN in 2000 is to "promote gender equality and empower women." United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals,"

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. For a critical reading of empowerment in relation to microlending, see Christine Keating, Claire Rasmussen, and Pooja Rishi, "The Rationality of Empowerment: Microcredit, Accumulation by Dispossession, and the Gendered Economy," *Signs* 36, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, no one to my knowledge has positively claimed the label "choice feminist." On this point, see also Jennet Kirkpatrick, "Introduction: Selling Out? Solidarity and Choice in the American Feminist Movement," *Perspectives on Politics* (2010): 242.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Ferguson, "Feminism and Security Rhetoric," 200.

---

<sup>11</sup> For a critical examination of this generational logic in the debates over choice feminism, see Lori Marso, "Feminism's Quest for Common Desires," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2005), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Belkin, "The Opt-out Revolution," *The New York Times*, October 26 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Louise Story, "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood," *The New York Times*, September 20 2005; Nancy Bauer, "Lady Power," *The New York Times*, June 20 2010.

<sup>17</sup> R. Claire Snyder-Hall, "Third Wave Feminism: A New Directions Essay," *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>18</sup> John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Mill, "Subjection of Women," 525.

<sup>20</sup> Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*, 56-57.

<sup>21</sup> Contrast this with hooks' equally capacious vision of a feminism for everybody; one which, however, requires that we take a hard look at ourselves and make significant changes in our lives: "the most powerful intervention made by consciousness-raising groups was the demand that all females confront their internalized sexism, their allegiance to patriarchal thinking and action, and their commitment to feminist conversion." *Feminism Is for Everybody*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie L. Heywood, "Introduction : A Fifteen-Year History of Third Wave Feminism," in *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, ed. Leslie L. Heywood (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), xx.

<sup>24</sup> Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> On moralizing as a problem within feminist and leftist thought, see Wendy Brown, "Symptoms: Moralism as Anti-Politics," in *Politics out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Naomi Wolf, "'Two Traditions, Excerpt from Fire with Fire'," in *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, ed. Leslie L. Heywood (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Wolf, "'Two Traditions, Excerpt from Fire with Fire'," 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Walker, "Liberate Yourself from Labels: Bisexuality and Beyond," in *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, ed. Leslie L. Heywood (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 487-488.

<sup>29</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 276.

<sup>30</sup> In the *Sex and the City* episode often cited as an example of choice feminism ("time and punishment"), Charlotte criticizes Miranda for being judgmental and not supporting her choice to end her career and start a family. For analysis of this episode in terms of choice feminism, see Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 17; Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 172-173; Summer Wood, "Freedom of 'Choice': Parsing the Word That Defined a Generation," in *The Women's Movement Today: An*

---

*Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, ed. Leslie L. Heywood (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 424.

<sup>31</sup> Ferguson, "Feminism and Security Rhetoric," 200; Rice, "Remarks at the 'One Woman Initiative' Fund for Women's Empowerment."

<sup>32</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 18-19; Wood, "Freedom of 'Choice'," 423-424; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 45-46, 178-181.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, "Freedom of 'Choice'," 423.

<sup>34</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 180.

<sup>37</sup> Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>40</sup> See also Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 172-173.

<sup>41</sup> See her self-consciously hip book peppered liberally with pop cultural references, slang, and the f-word, Jessica Valenti, *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Nina Power, *One-Dimensional Woman* (Winchester, UK: Polity, 2009), 30.

<sup>43</sup> Lori Jo Marso, *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women* (Routledge, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 26. The most extensive academic treatment of the problems of a liberal approach to choice for women is Clare Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 90-92.

<sup>46</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*.

<sup>47</sup> Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, esp. 197.

<sup>48</sup> Marso, "Feminism's Quest," 265.

<sup>49</sup> Wood, "Freedom of 'Choice'," 424.

<sup>50</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 36-38.

<sup>51</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 54, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, e.g. 17, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, "Freedom of 'Choice'," 423-424; Power, *One-Dimensional Woman*, 27-37.

<sup>54</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 15; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 209.

<sup>55</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 72.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., R. Claire Snyder-Hall, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'," *Perspectives on Politics* (2010).

<sup>57</sup> Snyder-Hall, "Third-Wave Feminism," 259.

<sup>58</sup> Linda Zerilli develops the contrast between these two concepts of freedom in feminist politics in Linda M.G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). through an engagement with the work of Hannah Arendt. See especially Hannah Arendt, "What Is Freedom?," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Snyder-Hall, "Third-Wave Feminism," 256.

<sup>60</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 98.

---

<sup>61</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 171.

<sup>62</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 159.

<sup>63</sup> Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 159.

<sup>64</sup> As Hirshman notes, judging is quite ordinary, if often unacknowledged: "Every time someone votes, they make choices about the kind of society they want to live in, and they are willing to use their numbers to impose that choice on the others in the society. Otherwise, they'd be anarchists or something and refuse to participate in governing, even by voting. And people give advice—gratuitous or solicited—to their friends and families, and they gossip and judge the people they know and the movie stars they don't know. They decide O.J. Simpson killed his wife and belongs in prison. They judge." *Get to Work*, 70-71. Surely choice feminists would not want women to stop judging in the poll booth, even if they would prefer that we not gossip or give interfering advice.

<sup>65</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 3, 78ff.

<sup>67</sup> Hirshman, *Get to Work*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 239.

<sup>69</sup> Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 240.

<sup>70</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000 [1983]).

## References

- Arendt, Hannah. "What Is Freedom?" In *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 143-171. New York: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Bauer, Nancy. "Lady Power." *The New York Times*, June 20 2010.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.
- "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action."  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html>.
- Belkin, Lisa. "The Opt-out Revolution." *The New York Times*, October 26 2003.
- Brown, Wendy. *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- . "Symptoms: Moralism as Anti-Politics." In *Politics out of History*, 18-44. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Chambers, Clare. *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2008.
- Ferguson, Michaela. "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 247-253.
- . "Feminism and Security Rhetoric in the Post-September 11 Bush Administration." In *W Stands for Women: How the Bush Presidency Has Shaped a New Politics of Gender*, edited by Michaela Ferguson and Lori Marso, 191-220. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Ferguson, Michaela, and Lori Marso. "Introduction: Feminism, Gender, and Security in the Bush Presidency." In *W Stands for Women: How the Bush Presidency Has Shaped a New Politics of Gender*, edited by Michaela Ferguson and Lori Marso, 1-14. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Heywood, Leslie L. "Introduction : A Fifteen-Year History of Third Wave Feminism." In *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, edited by Leslie L. Heywood, xv-xxii. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Hirshman, Linda R. *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. New York, NY: Viking, 2006.
- . "Homeward Bound." *The American Prospect*, November 22 2005.
- hooks, bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- Keating, Christine, Claire Rasmussen, and Pooja Rishi. "The Rationality of Empowerment: Microcredit, Accumulation by Dispossession, and the Gendered Economy." *Signs* 36, no. 1 (2010): 153-176.
- Kirkpatrick, Jennet. "Introduction: Selling Out? Solidarity and Choice in the American Feminist Movement." *Perspectives on Politics* (2010): 241-245.
- Levy, Ariel. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2006.
- Marso, Lori. "Feminism's Quest for Common Desires." *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 263-269.
- Marso, Lori Jo. *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women*. Routledge, 2006.

- Mill, John Stuart. "The Subjection of Women." In *On Liberty and Other Essays*, 469-582. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Power, Nina. *One-Dimensional Woman*. Winchester, UK: Polity, 2009.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, 356-368. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000 [1983].
- Rice, Condoleezza. "Remarks at the 'One Woman Initiative' Fund for Women's Empowerment." U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/05/104629.htm>.
- Snyder-Hall, R. Claire. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'." *Perspectives on Politics* (2010): 255-261.
- . "Third Wave Feminism: A New Directions Essay." *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008): 175-196.
- Story, Louise. "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood." *The New York Times*, September 20 2005.
- The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- United Nations. "Millennium Development Goals." <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.
- Valenti, Jessica. *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007.
- Walker, Rebecca. "Liberate Yourself from Labels: Bisexuality and Beyond." In *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, edited by Leslie L. Heywood, 486-488. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Warner, Judith. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2005.
- Wolf, Naomi. "'Two Traditions, Excerpt from Fire with Fire'." In *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, edited by Leslie L. Heywood, 13-19. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Wood, Summer. "Freedom of 'Choice': Parsing the Word That Defined a Generation." In *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism*, edited by Leslie L. Heywood, 422-425. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Zerilli, Linda M.G. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

